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Mrs. Nhu Running Constant Risk

*Viewed as Possibly Undermining
U.S. Decision to Stick With Diem*

Her features are more delicate than her phrases and Mrs. Ngo Dinh Nhu will run a constant risk, while she visits this country, of undermining the administration's renewed decision to try to see it through in South Viet Nam with her family's regime.

She cannot win her case in the public forum, where there is little detailed interest in the pros and cons of the Diem administration. But she can easily hurt her case in the Washington forum, where President Kennedy is struggling to maintain a consensus that the military effort in South Viet Nam must be pursued in spite of the Nhus.

She is attractive and pungent and she will have great access to the public, but she cannot expect to impress the officials, who remain sharply divided on the key question of whether it is possible to win in South Viet Nam against the handicap of President Diem's lack of standing with his people.

The public here cannot decide the rights and wrongs in the Buddhist persecutions. Mrs. Nhu will be raising issues that the administration has determined to ignore in a priority effort to establish a military security in South Viet Nam that will enable the country to deal with its political problems without the threat of Communist subversion.

The President settled upon this policy after a bitter internal struggle among his officials. The policy is recognized as a gamble at best and

its success will depend substantially on this government's ability to surmount its recent division, which left many scars upon the relationships between officials and agencies.

The division has been difficult to contain because there was validity on both sides. The feeling of State Department officials, particularly Averell Harriman and Roger Hillsman, that the United States could not afford the onus of support for an autocratic and oppressive regime was countered by the confidence of the Pentagon that the war against the Viet Cong could be won despite this liability.

The State Department expected that its indignation at the pagoda raids, could force a reform of the Diem government or its replacement by more moderate leaders. But the ways of the East are stubborn—neither the reforms or the alternative government developed, and the Department was left to deal with a regime that it had bitterly reproved.

The emotions arising from this frustration led to criticisms of the Central Intelligence Agency as the covert force that was holding the Nhus in power and obstructing the Department's policies. These laments found their way into the press and stirred the latent congressional uneasiness at the obscure nature of the agency's operations.

But the criticisms have been rejected by the top officials closest to the situation. The CIA appears in the pri-

vate record to have performed its assignments well in South Viet Nam. One of these assignments was to maintain direct dealings with Ngo Dinh Nhu, Mrs. Nhu's husband and the central figure in the Buddhist controversy. The nature and extent of this liaison were judged necessary in Washington because of Nhu's power and the CIA cannot be blamed for his intransigence.

The President summoned his Executive Committee, the inner core of trusted advisers that was born in the Cuban missile crisis, to bridge the dispute among his officials. He invited the former Ambassador to Saigon, Frederick Nolting, to sit with the Excomm while taking pains to assure the present Ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, that he stood ready to back his tactical judgments.

Cohesion has slowly emerged from an untidy situation. The CIA chief in Saigon, John Richardson, must be replaced because his cover has been destroyed. Some American officials there will be recalled if they seem incapable of working with the Diem government. But Lodge and the military commander, Paul Harkins, have a firm relationship and the expectation is that President Diem will co-operate to prosecute the war.

Mrs. Nhu can disrupt this fragile harmony if she uses her visit to agitate the debate on the merits of the Diem government. It seems less practical to resolve this question than to make the most of the dry season in the campaign to get rid of the Communist guerrillas.

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